Best Practice I

1. Title of the Practice

MAC-Cloud Learning Management System (LMS) for Online Teaching-Learning

2. Objectives of the Practice

With the onset of Covid-19 pandemic in India from March 2020, educational institutions in West Bengal were closed following a state-government order. Soon, the central government too followed with a country-wide lockdown related to this pandemic. As a result, in-person classes had to be replaced with online education, else teaching-learning would have been hampered.

3. The Context

The mode of online teaching-learning in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic-related lockdown did pose some challenges to the education sector initially. It was a completely unfamiliar terrain, as a result of which there were teething troubles during this phase of transition. Both students as well as teachers had to adjust themselves to this type of pedagogy, and this was not a smooth or quick process.

4. The Practice

Maulana Azad College, a premier institution of higher education in the city of Kolkata, was one of the first colleges in West Bengal to have a Learning Management System (LMS). Under this LMS named MAC-Cloud, all teachers of the college were allotted their separate accounts with their individual login id. and password sent to their registered mobile phones as One Time Password (OTP) which remained valid for 24 hours. This turned out to be very useful for the teachers for uploading study

materials as well as conducting periodic assignments. Students logged into MAC-Cloud using their Student Id. and accessed the files uploaded by the teachers. They also answered short and broad questions, as also Multiple-Choice-Questions (MCQ) for online assessments.

Although online education has been in place in developed regions of the world like North America, Europe, etc., it was a novel concept for educational institutions in our state of West Bengal. Both government-aided as well as private schools, colleges, universities and research institutes had to make a shift from the campus to classes in the digital realm. The students as well as the teaching community had to familiarise themselves with the use of electronic gadgets like desktops, laptops, electronic tablets and smartphones for having live online classes. Such smart-devices were owned by only those few who could afford to buy them, and consequently online education had only a limited penetration here. The other impediment to online education was patchy internet service. While some teachers did face interruptions at their end owing to unstable internet service at their residences, the problem was manifold in the case of students. The Covid-19 pandemic led to the closure of not just educational institutions but also hostels and paying-guest accommodations for students in the city. The out-station students had to return to their homes which were mainly in rural or semi-urban areas. Since broadband was mostly limited to the cities and towns, students had to bank on only their cell-phone networks for internet connectivity. The network of mobile operators was far from satisfactory in remote places, and it resulted in some students getting disconnected time and again during live online classes. Despite these constraints, our college managed to hold regular online classes which were attended by most of the students.

5. Evidence of Success

A smooth work-flow was charted out by the teachers with the help of MAC-Cloud and it facilitated the imparting of knowledge to the best extent possible under the pandemic situation. The Heads of all the

Departments also drafted time-tables for online classes via Google Meet with the able support of the College Routine Sub-Committee. Separate time-slots were earmarked for General Elective online classes so that they did not clash with the Honours routine of different Departments. Both students and parents / guardians appreciated the regularity of online classes at our college, and it was explicitly stated during online Parent-Teacher Meetings.

6. Problems Encountered and Resources Required

As far as online education was concerned, availability of adequate electronic gadgets and a stable internet connection became problematic issues. Lack of electronic gadgets like personal computer, tablet or even smartphone for all students emerged as the most pressing difficulty. This posed infrastructural handicaps for families with more than one child, since not too many families could afford multiple smart-devices. The West Bengal government came up with a scheme to offer financial aid to higher secondary students of government-aided schools so that they could purchases electronic tablets for attending online classes and write exams in the digital mode. A similar program for students of higher educational institutions could help in closing the digital divide.

Best Practice II

1. Title of the Practice

Rainwater Harvesting

2. Objectives of the Practice

Harvesting rainwater is a tried-and-tested practice across the world for conserving rainwater and recycling it. Every year, gallons of rainwater are washed away into waterbodies and sewers, effectively leading to their complete wastage. To prevent this, scientists have come up with techniques to conserve this rainwater and use it for a range of purposes.

3. The Context

The Principal of our college had taken initiative to harvest rainwater, and held initial talks with the Public Works Department of the Government of West Bengal. Following this, the PWD installed the requisite equipment in the campus of the college boys' hostel (Baker Government Hostel) for conservation of rainwater.

4. The Practice

India, being a country with a dedicated rainy season, is blessed with lots of rainfall. In recent years, it has experienced rainfall not only during the Monsoon months of June, July and August but also sporadic rains in other months. However, all this precipitation used to literally 'flow down the drain' because there was hardly any effort to conserve the rainwater. In view of this, it is indeed noteworthy that Maulana Azad College has taken the initiative to put rainwater harvesting in place. The requisite equipment was installed in the campus of the college boys' hostel for conserving rainwater. The rainwater thus collected was recycled for non-palatable uses like water in the bathroom, wash-basins, etc. Apart from this, a portion of the rainwater was fed into the earth through 'Groundwater recharge' in

order to increase the groundwater table. This assumes all the more importance in the context of news of water shortage in some Indian cities like Chennai and Hyderabad.

5. Evidence of Success

The harvesting of rainwater led to the twin goals of not only preventing wastage of rainwater but also recycling of an important natural resource. The water conserved through this process was used mainly for the purpose of washing at the college boys' hostel premises. Moreover, the recharge of this rainwater raised the level of groundwater table, contributing to the ecological health of the city of Kolkata.

6. Problems Encountered and Resources Required

Reuse of rainwater which otherwise goes waste is an important step towards conservation of a precious natural resource like water. However, installing the equipment required for harvesting of rainwater involves a lot of initial capital, as a result of which it is not common among the masses. Our college, being a government educational institution, could install it with relative ease since the task was carried out by the Public Works Department of the Government of West Bengal.